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FOR OES/STC EILEEN KANE

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PGOV, EINV, CO
SUBJECT: EMBASSY SCIENCE FELLOWS PROGRAM 2009 (COLOMBIA)

REF: A. STATE 10843
[1](#)B. BOGOTA 1
[1](#)C. BOGOTA 168

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY. Post submits the following two proposals, one to be managed by the Economic Section and the other by the Foreign Agricultural Service. Each of these proposals is geared toward advancing critical USG interests by creating the capacity to translate Colombian successes in counter-narcotics and security into sustainable economic growth and productivity. Post fully commits to supporting one fellow and will attempt to support a second, provided their visits do not overlap and funding remains sufficient. END SUMMARY.

PROPOSAL 1: INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING FOR COLCIENCIAS

[1](#)2. (SBU) On February 10, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe signed into existence a Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Law, intended to make STI to become a major driver of Colombian productivity and long-term economic stability. With this high-profile GOC commitment, Post believes it is the ideal time for an Embassy Science Fellow (ESF) in Colombia to promote this transformation and our efforts to expand the bilateral relationship beyond security and narcotics issues. Post specifically requests that an ESF assist the Colombian Institute for the Development of Science & Technology (Colciencias) -- similar to the National Science Foundation -- as it becomes a quasi-ministerial body and attempts to develop Colombia's STI research infrastructure, more public-private-academic linkages, and an international STI strategy. Colciencias Director Juan Miranda strongly supports this proposal, offering office space and in-country travel funds, while Post can provide housing, office space, and 1-2 in country trips for the ESF.

The Transformation of STI Into A National Priority

[1](#)3. (SBU) The February 2009 STI law increased GOC funding available for STI activities and research, elevated Colciencias to quasi-ministerial status, and created a public-private fund to ensure sustained STI investment (ref B). However, while the Director of Colciencias Juan Miranda is a leading advocate for the law and the STI philosophy it entails, he feared the new responsibilities his institution must assume. With limited expertise and the same number of personnel -- the law does not allow for increased hiring due to GOC attempts to limit bureaucracy -- Colciencias will

assume the added obligations and pressure of a full ministry.

While maintaining normal functions, Colciencias will now have to take the lead on developing national STI policy, manage an investment fund and convince other involved actors that STI investment is essential to Colombia's development. While the Director of Colciencias will now participate in ministerial meetings, have the lead voice in STI policy formation, and an increased budget (a 69 percent increase since 2006), Miranda told us that he is unsure as to how to actually transform Colciencias, as well as Colombia's STI research infrastructure.

Proposal Specifics

14. (U) The goal of our proposal is to assist Colciencias in its structural, financial and policy transformation. Specifically, we request that an ESF assist Colciencias develop a structure for public-private-academic linkages, internationalizing its operations, and participating in public outreach. Miranda has told us that he could think of no better way to improve the STI environment in Colombia than by partnering with and learning from USG S&T entities. While Colciencias collaborated with Post on the ideas listed below, they are not "set in stone," nor must the ESF address every issue. Colciencias would be grateful for any USG assistance as it attempts to analyze and strengthen Colombia's STI priorities and infrastructure, and would be open to different ideas posed by the ESF. However, the ESF should have an understanding of how multi-sector linkages thrive in the US, as well how USG-sponsored professional development programs for students and researchers function. While Miranda and many of his staff speak English, to get the most out of the program the ESF would preferably speak Spanish at the 3/3 level. It would be ideal, albeit not necessary, to have the ESF in country during the academic year (February-June or August-November), to best utilize the proposal's public outreach component.

15. (U) Public-Academic-Private linkages: To secure long-term progress in STI, Colciencias is looking for ways to increase the involvement of the private and academic sectors in STI policy-making and implementation. Presently, the GOC has direct, everyday control and supervision over the field, and local experts have told us that STI will never thrive in Colombia until private and academic actors become more important stakeholders. Colciencias has targeted specific areas for assistance including the structuring of research financing for joint public-private-academic sector projects, the creation of mechanisms that help to identify and match national industry needs with academic research programs, and institutional changes within Colciencias that can strengthen the roles of the private and academic sectors. The ESF, by consulting with high schools, universities, technical institutions, regional technology centers, independent research organizations, and private sector entities involved in STI, could help advise Miranda on ways to structure and best-utilize linkages between the sectors. To fulfill that objective the ESF would likely visit Medellin, as the Science and Technology Center of Antioquia (CTA) -- a public-private partnership founded by the municipal government in 1989 -- is Colombia's leading example of successful multi-sector STI integration (ref C).

16. (U) Internationalization Strategy: Colciencias believes that for STI to truly increase Colombia's competitiveness, Colciencias must be equipped to promote STI policy consistent with international best practices, as well as enable Colombia's students and researchers to collaborate with others on an international level. Miranda told us the International Department of Colciencias is presently developing a strategy to facilitate Colombian researcher's access to international knowledge and resources. He hopes this strategy will enable Colombia to address global challenges such as energy, food and water supply, and the digital divide that are impacted by STI. The ESF could assist Colciencias (i.e. by helping them identify areas for collaboration or joint research, develop networks for

Colombian researchers to work abroad and vice versa, access international STI resources, and identify potential bilateral or international agreements) as it attempts to project Colombian STI internationally and to contribute global STI objectives. Additionally, the ESF could possibly assist Post in its efforts to establish a US-Colombia S&T Agreement.

¶17. (U) Public Outreach: Miranda told us one of his new, primary responsibilities is to explain the economic potential of STI to other GOC cabinet members, ensuring their commitment to its development. He noted that an ESF, through participation in Colciencias forums or conferences, individual meetings at different ministries, or speaking opportunities at educational institutions, could help promote the importance of STI in the public sphere. Another component of the outreach could include visits and presentations to Colombian universities, discussing support for STI research through public-private partnerships and linkages with US-based research organizations and universities. The ESF could also provide information on the development of multi-university research consortiums focused on specific STI areas to help increase funding and research effectiveness. The Embassy Public Affairs and Economic Sections could help arrange such events. In-country travel would provide additional opportunities for the ESF to address groups and institutions that receive minimal Embassy outreach and engagement, due to financial and time constraints.

Embassy and GOC Support

¶18. (U) Embassy Support: Embassy Bogota commits to administratively supporting the ESF for one to three months. The fellow will have office space within the unclassified area of the Economic Section, and an apartment within the Embassy Housing Pool. However, the ESF might have to change apartments 1-2 times during his/her stay, as incoming PCS officers arrive and need to permanently move into the apartments. The FMO agrees to pay for 1-2 in-country trips. RSO supports the presence of a fellow at Post, and a security clearance is not required.

¶19. (U) Colciencias Support: During a meeting with EconOff in February, Miranda committed his full support of an ESF. He said that Colciencias could provide an office space for the ESF in its headquarters, as well as additional funding for in-country travel. Miranda also said that the ESF would have an "open door" to his office, always available to provide the fellow with assistance or guidance.

Contact Information

¶10. (U) Post Contact Information: ECON Program Officer is Megan Selmon; Email address: selmonml@state.gov; Telephone number: 011-57-383-2451; Cell phone number: 320-488-0210. EconOff Selmon will depart Post in August 2009, being replaced by Kristin Haworth. Haworth will be fully briefed on the proposal.

PROPOSAL 2: TRADE CAPACITY BUILDING FOR INVIMA

¶11. (U) Embassy Bogota requests a Science Fellow to interface with Colombia's National Institute for the Surveillance of Medicines and Food Products (INVIMA, FDA/FSIS equivalent) to detect and analyze food borne pathogens such as salmonella, with the ultimate goal of developing import regulations that are scientifically based. The project would also have a trade capacity building element. With improved laboratory protocols and procedures, Colombia will be better positioned to export as food safety standards are enhanced. Embassy Bogota is prepared to provide logistical and administrative support and to receive a food science-related fellow as early as June 2009.

The Need to Develop Science-Based Import Regulations

¶12. (U) Two years ago, the responsibility of food safety inspection was shifted from the Ministry of Agriculture to INVIMA, in the Ministry of Social Protection. INVIMA currently imposes a zero tolerance level for salmonella import requirements, which caused retention and/or rejection of U.S. poultry shipments valued at over USD 2 million. The GOC is currently developing legislation that is more consistent with international standards, so this is a timely opportunity for a visiting scientist to play an important role in the development of Colombia's regulatory policies and procedures.

Specific Proposal Projects & Activities

¶13. (U) A science fellow, located in the food borne pathogens laboratory of INVIMA, will help develop the capacity to detect and analyze food borne pathogens such as salmonella vis-a-vis the establishment of laboratory protocols and procedures that are scientifically based. The fellow would work hand-in-hand with Colombian scientists teaching microbiological testing methods and procedures. He/she would assess the management and operating procedure of the laboratory.

¶14. (U) The responsibilities of the science fellow will be to provide hands-on practice in detecting food borne pathogens with microbiology equipment that can assess technical capabilities of INVIMA to carry out analytical processes and assess laboratory procedures and management protocols and make recommendations to improve testing effectiveness.

Required Scientific Background

¶15. (U) The required areas of scientific expertise are a post-doctoral qualification in food borne illnesses, experience in the development and/or management of food borne pathogen detection methods and test procedures, and knowledge of science-based risk assessments used to develop pathogen tolerance levels and import standards. Moderate fluency in Spanish and experience working in developing countries to strengthen the capacity of local scientists and research institutions, is also required.

Embassy Support & Logistical Arrangements

¶16. (U) Post will provide housing. FAS Bogota will provide a workspace, unclassified computer, and internet access. FAS will fund any in-country travel expenses. A security clearance is not required for a science fellow working with the GOC's INVIMA. Furthermore, the timeframe can be any time starting in the third quarter of 2009, for a period of three months.

Point of Contact

¶17. (U) The point of contact for further information is Agricultural Counselor Todd Drennan, office tel: 57-1-383-2033, e-mail: todd.drennan@fas.usda.gov or Agricultural Attach Elizabeth Mello, tel: 57-1-383-2770, e-mail elizabeth.mello@fas.usda.gov.
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